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IN REPLY REFER TO

October 6, 1961

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
School of Medicine
Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

Dear Joshua:

I am sure that you have read accounts in the daily press of major organizational changes in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, primarily within the Washington Headquarters. A copy of the formal press release is enclosed. I believe that these changes will strengthen the role of science and facilitate a more effective use of the scientific resources of the universities in the national space program. Because of your participation in the activities of the Space Science Board of the National Academy of Sciences it seemed to me that you would be interested in having some additional background information.

When NASA was established in 1958, you will recall that there were essentially only two program directors, one for aeronautical and space research in ground facilities, and one for space flight development responsible for research carried out by rockets and satellites. The latter had an assistant director for space sciences. As the magnitude of the program increased and responsibility for large launch vehicles was assigned to NASA, accompanied by a transfer of the von Braun group at Huntsville, the launch vehicle responsibility was split off from the office of space flight development. The single program director was replaced by two, one for space flight programs, the second for launch vehicle programs. A few months later a program director for life sciences programs was added. This is the present organization to be changed on November 1.

Rather than dividing responsibility between spacecraft, launch vehicle, and life sciences, the new organization is based.

on the following three specific national objectives: (1) The scientific study of the space environment and celestial bodies to gain new scientific knowledge; (2) the early application of earth satellites and of space research and technology to immediate use for human benefit; and (3) the exploration of space by man. To these three objectives correspond the Office of Space Sciences, the Office of Applications, and the Office of Manned Space Flight Programs, each of which has the technical direction and resources control of projects in its area wherever the work is conducted, i.e., within one of the in-house Centers or by contract. The responsibilities of the former Office of Advanced Research Programs have been extended to cover advanced technology, becoming the Office of Advanced Research and Technology. I will discuss the life sciences in a later paragraph.

Under the new organization space sciences becomes one of four major program groups reporting directly to the Associate Administrator. The director of the Office of Space Sciences will be assigned responsibility for NASA's program of research grants and contracts with universities and will have a full-time deputy for this program, which will be considerably expanded in scope. A second deputy will give attention to the planning and management of flight projects. I will work directly with Dr. Newell on the scientific aspects of the program. Dr. Newell and Mr. Frutkin will work with me on the international program. In all of our activities we value your advice and counsel.

Our experience of the past few years has indicated the desirability of a different organization structure for the life sciences effort. We have found here, as in the physical sciences, marked differences of philosophy and method between those concerned with basic and applied research and those concerned with hardware engineering and life science support of flight operations. In addition the groups interested in basic biological experiments in space and the search for extraterrestrial life have a quite different interest in the program from other life science groups. The attempt to place responsibility in a single focal point has been found difficult. Hence the assignments indicated in broad outline in the press release will be made; obviously there are many details to be worked out.

A significant change in organizational relationships is the direct reporting of the Center directors of the field installations to the Associate Administrator rather than to program directors. This is a practical recognition of the fact that although the several Centers have different major functional responsibilities, all participate to some extent in all types of activity, advanced research and technology, space science, applications, and manned space flight. The program directors deal with specific functional activities, wherever located; the office of the Associate Administrator deals with overall institutional management and brings Center directors as well as program directors into the policy making and program decision operations.

I hope that you will find this discussion helpful in understanding the reasons for the organizational changes that have been announced. If you have questions, I will be glad to try to answer them, either by mail, or by personal discussion when you are next in Washington. We would like to provide you with an intimate contact with the total program of NASA as your time permits.

Sincerely yours,



Hugh L. Dryden
Deputy Administrator

Enclosure